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Purpose of Thesis

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This creative writing collection of commentary, poetry, and fiction illustrates the common emotions of women relative to intimate relationships with men. The woman's viewpoint is at the heart of the collection, composed in order to express thoughts and feelings and to bring to light the backbone of emotions within most women as perceived by this author. The intent is to communicate that no woman is alone in her feelings, that the most absurd thoughts have probably occurred to all women. The collection comes full circle from the first tugs of attraction to a man, to the disappointment and heartache, to standing proudly alone again.


Sketches of Emotions

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Margaret Dimoplon", is written over a horizontal line.

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Sketches of Emotions

Foreword

Episodes of a woman's life that you thought only you experienced. In the wholeness of a woman is a rainbow of emotions, a spectrum from bright to blue. I hope to capture many of these fleeting feelings with the pages of this book, my attempt to show each woman of the world that she is not alone. The rarest emotions and strangest thoughts you have are shared by countless others.

A woman spends half of her life, it seems, searching for a healthy emotional outlet. We dam up so much inside that when we crack, a flood of pain and tears can wash us away, carrying our friends and family away with it. Those outsiders, especially men, sometimes have a hard time understanding these tirades of emotion and they are something that even we cannot seem to explain. If a woman is emotional she is labelled as "psycho." The important thing to remember is that we do not have to explain ourselves to anyone. We only need to express the gales brewing inside, and find someone who can understand them. I hope that by reading this you feel the empathy stretching its fingers out to you.

This is not a book on social issues. It is not a feminist approach to life. The emotional and mental well-being of the individual woman is examined here. For some, my viewpoint may seem extreme and dramatic, reflecting my extreme personality. For those women who are more emotionally stable, more realistic, more logically oriented, some of these sketches will present

thoughts that never occurred to you, though I feel I've included some rather realistic fiction. Or perhaps, some have never experienced being in love, for example. But in general, for the daydreamer, the deep thinker, the romantic, the lover, my thoughts are yours, I am sure.

I.

Waiting-For-His-Call Syndrome

It's inconceivable. Why hasn't he called? He must have a good reason. It's not like him.

You pick up the phone and check for the dialtone, just to make sure all the phones in the house are on their hooks, and the phone company hasn't disconnected your line. Yep, the dialtone is there. When you're in the shower, you leave the bathroom door cracked and string the phone out as near to the bathroom as it will go, so if he calls, you'll jump out of the shower with shampoo in your hair and eyes, dripping wet and ice cold, to grab the receiver. We tell ourselves that being desperate is ridiculously demoralizing, but yet we still act out of desperation.

You won't leave the house, for fear he will call, and there is an answering machine-- but just the moment you'd leave he would call and say on the machine he's somewhere else but home and he'll call you back . . . and he never does. So better stay at home.

When the phone rings, a sick tide washes over your stomach. You answer with an anxious "hello?" and it's a man's voice that sounds just like his, but he asks for your roommate who isn't there and he's just someone from Marsh with a message that the video your roommate rented a week ago hasn't been returned. False alarm.

II.

Irrational Behavior

Do any of these sound familiar? Picking up in the middle of the night to go see him, or skipping out on classes or important business to do so. Driving by his house just to see if he's home (and if he is home, then why hasn't he called you . . .).

Perhaps the worst is changing yourself to be more like him. I know I gave up drinking for a whole two months once because the man I was after didn't drink. I also gave up the parties . . . oh, so many parties. Let's just say that girl never got boy. End of story. It was so nice to party again.

How about calling his number and letting it ring once, a hopeful reminder for him to call, just in case it slipped his mind?

III.

Infatuation

Instead of flaunting the independent woman you are out on the town, you're sitting at home at night, because he always calls at around 9:00. You cherish any remnants of his stays with you. Smelling your pillow after he's slept on it, wearing his clothes when he leaves them at your place and then washing them for him before returning them. Any notes he's written, messages saying he called-- all tacked to the wall. (Because it's just nice to remind yourself that he called.)

Prophecy Fulfilled

" 'Tis always darkest before the dawn."

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

"God never closes a door without opening another."

Rapture the poets fortold
Salvation lover's prophets professed
Baptized on this night
With this man in my sight
My yearning hath been put to rest.

Indeed he's the dawn aft' the darkness
Joy I reap from tears I had sown
My God opened the door
As grace bestowed the poor
After closing past doors I had known.

And a well hath sprung up from inside of me
One of love from which he will drink
To satisfy the thirst
That long he hath cursed
And knelt down, place his lips upon its brink.

This fountain of bliss is my gift
And the least that I shall give
For I have found
The sweetest of sound
Born forth from his sweet lips.

Steadfastly entwined as our fingers
Our souls are seemingly bound
As forever is long,
To him be my song
And with my kiss his head be crowned.

IV.

Adoration

What drives the wooden stake of love or unrequited love even deeper through the heart is when adoration sets in. The first time you see him talk endearingly to his dog like a father speaking to his newborn daughter, when you see his grade school pictures from first through twelvth, and see he hasn't changed a bit-- the same baby face, each picture displaying a different familiar facial expression. Watching him interact with his mother, hugging his sister. When he drives you around his hometown, pointing out places and telling stories of the trouble he and his friends used to get into there. To see his personality revert back to childhood innocence when he arrives at his hometown-- his heart warms, his voice grows softer, he is less self-centered and is suddenly the accomodating host. You watch him as he sleeps and caress his baby fine hair. You're certain that he's actually an angel, a little piece of heaven on earth.

Then there are the things he does when you get angry with him to make it all better. Remembering that you wanted a frozen Coke slushie the day before, he comes out with a super-sized one for you after paying for gas at the 7-11. You turn to mush and can't possibly be upset with him any longer.

He Said . . . She Said: Sonnet No. 1

Licking wine drops from her drunken curl,
Whispering, "You are my travesty,"
Said he, "You are my tragedy,"
And claiming one pin let her tresses unfurl.
"A toast to the sanguine lips of a girl
That suffocate me most sensuously;
May it be me to rule your manarchy?
I do so adore you, can you not see?"
Her porcelain cheek quenched with a single nectar tear,
She stole away his longstemmed glass of love elixir,
And cradling his face of impassioned fear,
Drew his eyes in through hers of blackest liquor.
To this barefoot knight bathed in brilliant moon dew
She gave one enchanted kiss that flawlessly spoke, "I do."

Sinews and Rivers

She whispered for him to raise his weary body to his knees for just a moment. She peeled his sweater over his shoulders and head, untucked two layers of cotton tees and gently tugged them up along his ticklish sides and slid his arms through. He always wore layers-- of shirts, sweatshirts, tee-shirts, of pants, boxers, gym shorts, of socks, two pair, for no particular reason, perhaps to prevent blisters at practice-- and as she'd cast secret glances at him, reclined and half-asleep, he'd have a cozy aura about him. But it was always her pleasure to work off the layers as he lay exhausted at the end of the day. He'd come to the door-- "Hey, kiddo!"-- and drop his gym bag and books like lead weights, then ritually unvelcro his sandals and peel off the pants of his uniform. He'd lean over and kiss her lips lightly saying, "How are you?" with the emphasis on "you" and lean back alongside her with a whine about how tired he was. She couldn't bear not touching him, so as an excuse she told him to roll over and she'd rub his back. She bared his back, and he lay on his stomach with a sigh.

She straddled the tops of his thighs so she wouldn't pressure the small of his back. Only a little light from the muted television illumined his skin, and she drank in one long look before beginning her art. Funny, how the warm tone of his skin filled her with fuzzy tingling that started within her breast, channeled through her sensitive, longing fingertips,

and softened her eyes. Her eyelids bowed as she drowned in the rush of love flooding into her palms. She softly pressed at the small of his back and playfully scratched at his waistline where the tan summer skin turned abruptly winter white, being careful not to tickle his childishly sensitive sides. She pushed her pink thumbs deep and dragged them up along either side of his spine, then shallowly rubbed, rubbed, kneading her palms into his dough-like flesh. Trickling a fingertip up to his shoulder blades, she caressed the shadow they cast on his skin, playfully pin-pointing each cappuccino freckle that lay in her path. She had counted them once. She had told him he had just over a hundred of them. They gathered on his shoulders in clusters like stormclouds, and then grew more scant and dispersed as they fell down his back like raindrops until there were none to be seen on the lower half of his satiny back. She hit the spot between his shoulder blades that was his particular favorite, signified by a groan of pleasure-- "Right there,"-- followed by a deep exhale. She worked the knots free and followed the trail of his spine to the massy muscle lying just above his blades, resting below his bony shoulders. It was her favorite place of his back, a place so concentrated with strength, a creased sheet of sinew, so toughened and hard, but with tender flesh and soft skin caressing the stone beneath-- a pillow with which her cheek dovetailed if she lay her chest down on top of him. She could fall asleep like that. She massaged that place with all her love until her hands cramped.

She leaned down and touched that flesh with her loosely

drawn lips, brushing them over the ridge of his backbone, dragging her nose teasingly up the faint soft hairs along the back of his neck and pausing in the scent of his hair at the nape. She ran a finger over his right shoulder, wondering if it was as sore as it usually was. She had always told him he could have hers; hers worked fine and he needed it more than she did. She was about to ask him if it ached when she felt his hand twitch through a hushed tremor up his arm. She knew another would soon follow, in his foot, in his fingers, telling her he was nearly asleep.

She clicked off the silent TV and lay down beside his serene body, watching the moonlight dance like fairies across the river of his skin, using freckles as stepping stones. She could hear their carefree giggles in the rush of his breath, singing her to sleep.

V.

You Know You're In Love When . . .

To love is to have the privilege of experiencing a person, and that experience make you whole. To look into his face is to gaze into the face of a child, the face of a man, and the face of God, all as one. To quote Dante's Inferno, "The more perfect a thing is, the more bliss or pain it feels." What you have must be perfect, because you've never felt such bliss! And it is in the midst of this bliss that everything else in your life goes all to hell. With this new-found devotion, all other things slip, especially when all you want to do is spend time with him. Your room is a pigsty, mail goes unopened for days because you've forgotten all about the existence of the postal service, dishes from food you don't remember eating stack up. No time for reading class texts, only to look at pictures in magazines, watch movies, and listen to love songs on the radio. No time to eat, no need to sleep, a skipped class insignificant. You haven't called half of your friends you should call since he's the only one you seem to chat on the phone with anymore. You have no groceries but feel no need to go buy some. There's no toilet paper left and there hasn't been for two weeks, and you don't care. You feel no need to get a job to pay the rent in a month, the cable bill can just sit there, the electric company can go to hell. The trash is running over, the dust bunnies are skipping across the TV set, and the gas tank is running on empty. You spend money you don't have. You sing aloud every place you go, always with a grin

plastered to your face. And here's the clincher: you would gladly exchange your life for his because an existence without him would be worse than death. Besides, as Jerry Falwell says, "There is no way that we will ever be willing to die for something for which we are not willing to live."

First Love

Cracked fingertips trace trails of tears
Left eons ago from the crying years.
Deep ravines my skin bears
From the pain that I shared
With only paper.

Now wrinkles flood again
As the salt drops splash my hand.
Though I am old and he is gone
My heart never fails to long
For his touch.

He is, too, far away
Growing older with the day,
With a past of his own
And a love that has grown
For himself only;

Or so I like to wish.
Surely someone plants her kiss
Upon his forehead every morn
And his life is no longer torn
By his obscure future.

The only future we have left
Is to unite as one in death.
Perhaps in heaven you will find
That the light that left you blind
Was my love.

Lady Beacon

The crow's nest was sucked into the belly of the sea and the tip of the mast followed into the pitch that was to be the ship's grave. There had been no promise of St. Elmo's lightening, but instead an inferno swallowed the proud warship as a rain of cannonfire tore the sails, pierced the deck, and sunk the hull.

She stood in horror on the outcropping overlooking the English harbour. She had rushed to the cliff anticipating the return of her fiancée. His last battle against the Spanish Armada had been a success, just as the many conflicts before had been. The Royal Navy was the foremost naval power in the world, and he had led the invincible fleet to its glory. They were to be married upon his return to port. The hills fencing the west coast of the inlet hid the squadron of Spanish ships poised on the other side, armed for a second attempt on the English if the rest of the Spanish fleet was defeated. In bloody vengeance, the remaining armada revealed itself and cornered the triumphant fleet into the harbour, the English ships only hundreds of feet from precious land. Caught off guard, the weary, homesick English were bombarded in home port, the grey dusk sky blackened with catapulted iron.

Rebecca's smiling eyes turned glassy with tears. Her skin paled and flushed, the roar of the blood in her ears equal only to the horrible crash of the breakers on the rocks below. She stood helpless, following the path of her love from the lee

to the port side of the deck, from bow to stern. The scrambling of the sailors to arms was too fumbled and too late, and Jonathon's cries and commands to the crew were lost in the thunder of cannons, though she heard every word. And then one cannonblast sounded louder than the others, it seemed, and in a fiery flash the deck below his feet was obliterated, its blazing splinters floating upon the crests of the waves. The smoldering frame interred itself into the watery graveyard. Then all was silent, but Rebecca's sobs echoing down the rockface.

Her toes embraced the cliff's rugged edge, crumbling shale falling through sea mist to clink with the jagged razor rocks below. The ones that made no sound were nonetheless swallowed by a lashing tongue of seawater that rhythmically raked the treacherous crop of stone. She wished that she may be swallowed too, her tears like salty oceandrops falling. She had wept the whole sea into being, she felt. The boulders bore invisible Sirens singing for her to come to them.

She would join his spirit then. She gripped her toes to the flinty rock, and chips tumbled into the blackness, but to her the grumbling surf was more the lullaby voice of a child. She took one last glance where Jonathon's ship once sailed. But just before lowering her eyes, she spotted a drifting patch of hull on the horizon. Three men rode upon it, and two in the water clung to its edge. She heard the voice of Jonathon barking commands from the floating scrap.

Rebecca's lungs filled with the bite of sharp night air

and her pulse ran crazed. New light from some intangible source filled her eyes. The drooping corners of her mouth lifted and her tearstained cheeks glowed like stars. So much did her heart shine that it could be a beacon to lost and lonely ships in the night fog. She took a step back, but too late, for her planted foot fell with the crumbling shale. She could scream no cries, her lungs still paralyzed with the shock of Jonathon's triumph over death. She fell torturously, and slowly, as a silk scarf may drift downward.

VI.

"Paradise Lost"

or

The One That Got Away

Three times in my life I've experienced the one-time love at first sight from afar complex. You are in another state or country, and you'll never meet him, but when he passed by, smiled, and winked at you, it was the Fourth of July in your stomach and your heart was floating up there with cloud nine. The chemistry was explosive though you never exchanged a word, and you'll never see him again. You don't know whether to cry or keep on smiling. Once back home, if you have any information about the guy what-so-ever, you attempt to track him down. Maybe a private detective would do the trick? But the feeling is quick to pass. It's gone the next time you pass a man on the sidewalk.

VII.

I Finally Got Him, . . . But Now I Don't Want Him

You're up for the chase, but when your pussycat paws snag that little field mouse, you play with it a little, then leave it to move on to something alive. This little game is usually associated with men, but for every game a man plays, a woman does the same. Maybe it's a matter of fearing commitment in any form. Or possibly, as is my case, you've been the aggressor for so long and you're used to a long drawn out struggle to win his heart. If the struggle isn't tough enough, or if it ends too soon, all interest disappears. Emerson said, "Every ship is a romantic object, except that we sail in. Embark, and the romance quits our vessel, and hangs on every other sail in the horizon."

Sow, or Ode to the Diet Coke Man

I like to look at men.
I like to watch them from a distance,
their hair color,
clothes and weight.
As they move closer
I watch for bird-legs and lovehandles,
unibrows and craters.
I love defined pecs and flat stomachs,
athletic thighs and hypnotic eyes.
I like to look at men who
like to look at me,
not the ones who know
I like to look
at them.
At them, I roll my eyes
and say piss off,
I hate your type
because you're just like me.

VIII.

Using Sex To Get Him

. . . Doesn't work. Having sex with him won't get him to commit. It is instead letting him have his cake and eat it too. Unfortunately most of us have to learn this the hard way. I admit it. I too have thought, "If I have some sort of sexual encounter with him, he won't be able to bear being away from me." Women are renowned for their sexual powers as seen logged through the annals of history and literature, but yet when it comes to using it in real life, it doesn't work that easily. We're no Cleopatra and Helen of Troy. Instead, having sex will not guarantee keeping your guy. As women we like to think that our seduction and mystique is enough to make a man crazy about us. Sure, they're crazy about us, for about five minutes or however long the act takes. Using sex doesn't work. We get left behind facedown in the dust, feeling used. Sex isn't love.

IX.

Signs

Following desperation comes a period in which everything is a sign. Everytime you turn on the radio and MTV, either Meatloaf's "I Would Do Anything For Love" or Janet Jackson's "Again" is blaring. And I mean every time. You think, "Does this mean something? Is it good?" You've naturally associated him with these songs. An amusing anecdote: for me it's squirrels. They're God's messengers to me, telling me to smile. They pop up in the oddest places, even in the dead of winter. You think, "Squirrels are everywhere! Of course you're going to see squirrels!" But I don't look for them. I just happen to look up and be in a dead stare with a squirrel. Call me kooky.

Signs will predict something really bad happening, too. Once I looked down at my desk in class and someone sitting there before me had inscribed the words "LET GO" on the desktop. Nevertheless I was in a deadend relationship at the time with no potential for commitment. I took the desk's advice.

And those damn fortune cookies! They'll hit you where it hurts every time: "You are the guiding star of his existence," "The next full moon will beam happiness your way." Somehow they can always apply to your life. I know that next full moon was the one I was kissing Aaron under for the first time . . .

Faces of the Storm

The typical dusky blue of an early evening sky turned molasses black, foreboding millions of crystal clear droplets. A single thunder-call was answered by a splintering slash, and the raindrops were earthward-bound. Some fell to the grassy plain of the young woman's backyard, others to the belts of corn farmed by the neighboring young man. The ferocity of the drilling rain increased as the clouds spread flat and scant. The wind blasted, sharpening the gentle warm summer raindrops. It was a torrential soliloquy. The rain pecked mockingly at the young farmer's window, and smeared his view as it streaked the glass. The pane quaked with every peal of thunder, as did each delicate pale piece in his antique china cabinet. The flashes following barely illumined the greyed gothic walls of his home. The young farmer gritted his teeth, and scowled, scrambling to his back door. Throwing it open in hellish fury, he cursed the storm as he helplessly watched the rain and the gales drive his corn to the ground. The once strong proud golden stalks sank penitently, their long leaf blades bowed as if by flogging. His small dirt yard was never normally dusty but healthily moist, yet now it was a sea of mud engulfing his work boots. The rain that pelted his weathered face felt as dirty as the sopping mud. Hot tears of disappointment and hardship lolled just in the corners of his eyes as he pondered what he was going to do.

The rain was calling her out to play. Each drop clung

to the pane and magnified the ethereal lightening strikes like prisms, a splintering rainbow tapping invitingly at the young woman's window. She rose from her light slumber and drew her white cotton gown to her knees, sitting aside the featherbed and gazing mesmerized out the window with an impish grin across her face. She pranced to the window, threw it open, and squeezed through just as the floorboards rattled in delight of the thunder. One foot down tested the warm pools of rainwater and the other anxiously bounded down. She darted to the flower garden as the raindrops painted her face and shimmered in the moonbeams dancing between fleeting clouds. The birdbath was brimming, much to her delight, and the grass was as green as her spritelike eyes. Each blade was bathed, each flower petal's thirst quenched. Giggling and cooing like a child, she danced with her arms and fingers outspread, her head thrown back, then side to side, her eyelids closed to buffet the delightful sting pelting her eyes.

The rainfall slowed. The moon scattered its silvery rays. The young farmer scowled and slumped disgustedly into his house. The young woman smiled at the sky and climbed through her window, her wet white gown stuck to her calves.

Then all was silent, save for the musical chirping of tree frogs and the moan of the wind in the fallen corn.

X.

Can't We Just Be Friends?

Hearing that phrase is like nails down a chalkboard. It's a universal line; we've dished it out for every time we've taken it. But no matter how practical it may be, the words never sting any less. It's just down-right cruel on the heart to be expected to reduce love and affection to friendship in the snap of your fingers. And if it isn't bad enough before a relationship gets started, it's even worse when it comes out of the mouth of your boyfriend. Now that you've been snubbed, what do you do with the love leftovers?

XI.

Unrequited Love

Falling in love with someone who doesn't feel the same can be the most excruciating pain you've ever felt. Sometimes it's so bad that you'd rather cut off your right arm or die than to have to bear it, because it isn't the quick sharp pain of a pinprick-- it is a cancer that breeds and thrives, spreading throughout every tissue of your body, beginning with your heart and ending with your mind. Once it reaches your mind, it plagues every area of your life: your career or studies, your free time, your social life. All is oriented towards him. Because you love him, he has penetrated the entire network of your life, and getting him out of your mind is like getting poison out of circulating blood. You can't concentrate on work and all your free time had been spent with him or thinking about him or doing things for him, and you have whittled the many facets of your social life down to one-- just him.

Just remember, it is as important to know that you are capable of loving as it is to get the opportunity to love and be loved.

Unrequited Love

She silently weeps in his ear,
He cannot see her face.
The darkness has engulfed them
In a time without place.
The time is more a moment,
More a tear within his locks,
A prayer that can't be heard,
A wave upon the rocks.
If he could see through blackness,
In her face he'd see
The anguish her heart harbors,
The love he won't let be.
So in the night they lie,
Her self with his entwines.
As he grows weak and falls to sleep
Her heart screams and pines.

XII.

Trying To Get Over Him

Trying to move on can be an intricate process of using others. We may tend to use old lovers to aid us through recovery. You reconnect old connections with someone you just can't feel the same way about anymore. You kiss him and he holds you, nuzzling your neck. It feels good because you've gone months without it. The man you love won't give you that. But with this man, that's as far as you can go anymore. You don't desire his body the way you used to when you were lovers, long before you fell in love with the man you're trying to get over. The whole situation hurts so bad. You realize the only one you want in that intimate way is the one you have to get over, the one you can't have. Thus, you can't get over him even though you are trying. You leave the ex-lover, run to your car and sob with your face in the steering wheel, whimpering and half apologizing to him, half apologizing to yourself, "I'm sorry, but I love someone else! Why can't I just let go?" Your thoughts are dominated by the idea that you'd give anything to see your love right now. But it's late and he's probably asleep, as you should be. You cry yourself to sleep, trying to sort out the mess your heart is in.

Starving for Affection

I am sitting right next to you.
Do something!
Reach out and touch me!
I'm crying out for you to hold me.
If you did, everything would be O.K.
All my troubles would melt away.
All my pain-- all my pain
Instead I torturously contain.
Why can't you do something so simple?
I would do it for you.
But weariness never shows on your face
And pain never shines through.
Mine is screaming out now
In floods you never fathomed;
To think I could hold so many tears!
You have no idea of the pain over the years.
I'm sorry to release it all now before you,
To lie crumpled before your eyes,
But I can't control the floodgates
Of a decade of my cries.

XIII.

Questioning Yourself

What did I do wrong? Was it my fault? Was there something I didn't do, something I said? I've been playing it over and over again in my mind. I just can't see where I went wrong. What was wrong with me? Was I not pretty enough? Was I too inhibited? I should have danced with him more. If we hadn't gone to that one party he wouldn't have gotten bored. Was I boring, was that it? Was it because I didn't hang on him like a wet teeshirt? I thought I should play it cool and give him breathing room. Did I do something to piss him off? Did I blow it for good? Have I lost him forever? Will he give me a second chance?

Perhaps some of the time we are guilty of some wrong doing. But the rest of the time, we are blameless and only searching for answers and information not provided us by the man leaving you in the dark. It's kind of like when you enter middle school or high school and suddenly your best friend thinks she's too good for you and turns you away. Her only explanation when you ask her what you did wrong is, "You know what you did!" It's a cop out. Though we are not to blame, we inflict it upon ourselves when a man or a friend leaves us without answers to our questions. In unresolved situations with men, I too have a bad tendency to blame myself and question my judgment, and all my friends tell me not to. And naturally they are right, but when in the midst of an open-ended situation or problem, it is human nature to question yourself.

XIV.

Stages of Weeping

You can't study or work. You've lost any remnant of an appetite. And after flooding the room with tears, there is the mellowed daze of depression that follows. You just kind of shake your head in disbelief and your eyelids are swollen three times their normal size, your eyeballs are dehydrated and it burns to blink, because of course you are in a staring contest with the TV set.

The next day you wake up with nothing to look forward to, so you're in a depressed/angry mood. You wish you had the physical ability to sleep all day. Nothing matters. You have a scornful but forlorn look on your face. It seemed your whole life encompassed him, and now you're left with nothing. Every love song on the radio hurts, you cry with a thought of him or a mere mention of his name. Oh, and when your friends try to ask you how you are doing, you break down in a heartbeat.

Of Woman

No peace
but in sleep
where the granted dreams creep

And a love
lives fulfilled,
not withered

Where the pining of the heart
is answered,
not forgot

O, the tender frail sadness
of woman.

XV.

It's-Easier-To-Hate-Him-Than-Be-His-Friend Stage

When he walks into the room, it's easier to snub him with a self-righteous grudge than it is to force a smile and mutter a greeting, all the while your heart shattering into a thousand pieces for the millionth time (after all, you live just around the corner from each other). Do they really understand how painful it is to simply pass by them? To see a picture of them? Speaking to him is inconceivable. It is far far easier to hate than to love, in all walks of life. And in the case of lost love, it is a very easy transition to make, and somewhat healthy, I believe. It gives you a place to channel the energy. So if it works, use it, I say. Some day, some year, you can get beyond the grudge and accept his friendship. But do whatever works for you at the time.

I'd Be Better Off If You Were Dead

I love you but,
I'd be better off if you were dead.
At least then I could mourn you,
Reflect fondly upon your memory
And miss you, in passing.
How can I miss you when
You are so near.
I'd rather miss you from afar.
I wish you lived in
Another city,
Another state,
No-- another country.
Then I wouldn't have to see you
Or hear about you.
No, I'm only fooling myself to
think that I wouldn't fly
to the corners of the earth
for but a kiss from you.
No, better off dead.
As far away from me as possible.
A mere six feet under my feet.
I'd be better off if you were dead.

XVI.

Revenge Factor

or

"Hell Hath No Fury . . ."

Hit'em where it hurts: their tragic flaw. If he was a player, his obvious flaw lies in his masculinity and self-image. I once considered running an ad in the personals for SWHM, "single white homosexual man seeking partner, contact Brent Simpson." Suddenly this ladies man would get calls from interested men-- letters in the mail, machine messages. It would totally give him a complex.

Or maybe his flaw lies with the great relationship he has with his mother, very accessible for disclosing juicy tidbits of what her little boy's been doing while away at college.

Skywrite "Stay away from Brent Simpson" in smoke in the sky.

Dump a well of permanent black ink in his load of whites, a bottle of bleach in his darks.

He's a computer science major, or the computer is his life? Set an industrial-sized magnet on top of his harddrive and destroy the computer system, as well as wiping each disk clean with just a swipe of the magnet.

If you know his social security number and practice his signiture, change his mailing address and forge it, sending all his bills to Timbucktoo-- too bad they won't get paid.

The possibilities are endless. You don't have to be Lorena Bobbit to blow off a little steam.

Gigolos

They pick your bones
And lash their tongues
Across their greasy lips.
They tear your flesh
And grin, as down
Their throats your lifeblood drips.
Vultures, they are!
The lot of them!
They rip your soul apart.
Their talons, strengthened by your love,
Beaks sharpened with your heart.
And when they've drank their fill,
When they need your love no more,
They leave your corpse to rot in the sun
. . . Yet a pulse amongst the gore.
So burn my body all you like,
A skybird I am too.
I'll rise up from the flames
As the phoenix, life anew.
They cannot kill my spirit
Though they use me as they will;
I simply rest in hope that one day
Their own blood shall spill.

XVII.

Standing On Your Own . . . All Alone

A phone call with my younger sister recounted my own past struggle.

She broke into tears over the phone. She had graduated from high school a semester early, separating herself from her acquaintances (she had few close friends, her best friend living on the other side of the country now). But graduating early wouldn't be all that separating, because the man she was dating at the time was graduating too. She was to get a job and work until college next fall. But now her working days were infrequent, the man she was dating needed much more space and time with his friends (like 24 hours a day), and her friends were nonexistent. I believe it was the lowest, loneliest period in her life. She was all alone, down to every last social branch. I, her closest friend and only sister, was away at college and despite being only thirty minutes away, was so busy with my own life of dating and studying that I couldn't visit or have her visit as often as she really deserved. Coming from the same situation, from the same high school, same pool of rotten men and snobby girls, she was reliving my past. My heart and my advice went out to her.

"I know it hurts, and every day is the same. You're lonelier than you've ever been in your life and you feel like everyone has deserted you. But you have to learn to be alone, and like it. You cannot expect there to be someone with you every day of your life. You have to learn how to be alone now

because you'll have to do it a lot more in the future, whether you like it or not. You cannot depend on a man to always be there. And as for friends, you have to become best friends with yourself and acquaintances with everyone else. You have to become independent and proud of it. You cannot sit at home on your butt every night drowning in self-pity with the TV set. Use the period of time to rent a million movies you missed during the school year because you were too busy to go see them. Go out by yourself on the weekends. Get dressed up and go to the theatre, go out to eat. But when you do, when you doll yourself up comparable to any model, when you stroll into the lobby, you have to know that you are the shit! You are the most beautiful, most sexy, most intelligent, intriguing woman in the place, the best God has to offer man in a woman. Make the other women decide to create their own majesty, inspired by yours. Play on your mystique. You have to believe every man's eyes are on you and every woman is writhing in jealousy. If you don't elevate your self-esteem and self-awareness, no one else will. They can't do that for you. You have to know what you are, know what you have to offer, and know that life will not always be so empty. Turn the corner and opportunity will hit you in the face. But for now, use this period of your life to discover the woman you are and all you are capable of. For me, my life began the first day of college, as yours will in a few months. Just a few months, April! You should be getting excited and the suspense killing you! Use this time to prepare yourself and to dream. Take it easy now, because the fresh

start will be exhausting in a positive, exciting way. Loneliness doesn't last; it only seems to. The hours go by far slower than they do when you're in the fast lane. And time hurts, and loneliness leaves shellshock instead of visible wounds. But only you can draw yourself up from your knees and flower into the strong woman you are."

As Bridget Fonda said in the movie, "Singles", "Being alone. There's a certain dignity in it."

Oh, and by the way, about a month later she met the man that she is now engaged to marry next year.

Sexual Harassment

Don't look
Don't touch
Don't comment
Don't lust
Don't tickle
Don't harass
Don't double-take
Don't check my ass
Don't hey baby
Don't baby
Don't Don't
Don't
Don't

You'll Have to Speak Up

Are you afraid of the sound
of your own voice?
Would it startle you
to assertively speak?
Or do you comfort yourself
with your lullaby voice,
as sound softly drifts over your ears?
I would yawn half the day
if I spoke that way!
Like giving a soft handshake (I'll bet you do)
and greeting people without care.
Grasp their hand with a grip
that will make their heart skip
as you feel the pulse in their fingertips.
Nice! they will say
with a grin and a new
opinion of you,
you--
most confident in all you do.

The Empty Canvas

As her consciousness came back to her, she could feel the stifling warmth of the room. She squeezed her closed fist more snugly. Her hand felt sticky and moist with morning sweat. She listened to her own contented breathing, savoring every upheaval and relaxation of her chest. Her pillow smelled unfamiliar, yet familiar, not like herself, but like someone she knew. She lay there until the muscles circling her eyelids gave out, exhausted, and her lids popped open though her lashes clung to her cheeks. The light coming into the loft through the bay window was blinding. In the garden a splintering sunspot radiated from a small fall of water pouring continuously from the marble jug a statue held, a fountain resembling Aquarius. The glare the sun cast filled her eyes, and with a squint, she closed them again, deterring the headache the brilliance encouraged. She edged her shoulders up along the headboard and wiped her hands on the strange satin sheets, unsure of her whereabouts. Then she opened her eyes to the summery-sweet room, seemingly three shades darker than it should be. She blinked again and squinted across the room, shaking off the temporary blindness from the sun, and attempted to find her bearings. As the darkness swept away from her pupils to her peripheral vision, she could see an easel manifest itself before her, a broad canvas fixed upon its ledge, covered with a dusty and paint-spattered sheet. Her full vision recovered, the whole room came to light and she smiled, relieved, remembering where

she was. She stretched out her arms to the ceiling like an awakened cat and yawned. Her lips curled in a plaster smile, she fell back again into the pillow with a muffled squeal of delight, exhaling deeply, and inhaling the scent of his hair captured within the down. Her left arm splayed across open space; he was not there. He had said he had an early appointment at the gallery that morning. She sighed deeply and reminisced.

He was an artist --a painter-- and a poet, when he felt the need. She remembered meeting him in a Shakespeare course. She giggled, thinking how much his subtle genius had annoyed her at first, though he was a little more composed and cool than his brash philosophic friends on their soapboxes. His appearance never particularly caught her eye. In fact, she was taken aback whenever he spoke a word to her, as if he knew her. How odd it was for her to hear him say her name, that he had taken the time to memorize it from a roll call. She humored his attempts at conversation. But the day he captured her attention was when he had read her published story and commended its artistry. A later day, upon critiquing an analysis of hers, he praised her mastery of critical writing. The feeling was so new --a woman, being appreciated for her mind, not judged by her body. He confessed that his mural proposal for a classroom wall had been rejected. She was sorry for him and said so. Then he offered her the photographs he'd taken of his paintings.

She would never forget the amazement she felt that a human hand could trace such lines, mix such color, imagine such form.

She analyzed each one as though it were a work of literature offered up for critical response. When she'd finished, she saw for the first time his face as it had always been. His cheek was smooth as if windblown to refined curvature and texture. His eyes were deep-set and black, as jagged as knives but sometimes bathed and buffed to a laughing glow or bored stupor. He had a sarcastic keen wit, and used it often for aside commentary, much to the humor of the class, and in doing so she took note of his smile, soft pink lips and porcelain teeth. Then his mouth would fall at the corners again in a bored grimace. This man that filled her eyes was cut of the same cloth as she was, a man fighting to express himself and struggling against mundane life that dulls the senses. He had depth, he had talent, and intelligence and humor. She felt honored that he had shared these paintings, this part of his life with her, a total stranger. And a stranger to her he was as well.

Several weeks of class followed and the final day of class came. The semester of his company in class had not satisfied her, nor caused her to lose interest in him, but it made her tongue bold and uninhibited. They arranged to meet at a pub nearby to shoot pool and have a few drinks.

They met again and she embarrassingly showed him a few of her sketches of imaginary lovers intertwined, at which he smiled, finding their passionate subject matter to be like that found in her writing, his subjects more melancholy and realistic than romantic and idealistic. They returned to his place, a

loft rented in a large cottage just outside the city. The yard was vast, with trimmed shrubs and kempt gardens, goldfish ponds and granite fountains. Such a loft with a view would never have come cheap, if the elderly widower that owned it were not a friend of his family. She could not imagine his affection for such a fantastical dream of a place. Perhaps appearances deceived and he was a man of boiling tempers and restless romance. The loft was spacious and white, with little, yet artfully designed and carefully placed, furniture about the room. The moon white-washed the room through an enormous window, some ten feet across and again that high. It seemed all the world could see in, though the ivyed garden wall must first be scaled. She turned away from the window to the easel perched waiting near the foot of the bed, its ready canvas bleached pale silver by the moonlight.

She looked to him. He sat in a simply but craftily carved chair poised in the corner, observing her. The beams flooding through the great window pane illuminated his face to a god's likeness. As she walked slowly to him the musical clomp of each step resounded throughout the room. Standing before him she stroked his soft angular cheek with her gently trembling thumb. So suddenly that it nearly frightened her, he grabbed her forearm, gently but firmly, and pausing a moment, brought the inside of her wrist to his lips. His eyelids fell heavy as he kissed the pulsing veins. Then in pulling her arm reluctantly away, she pulled him to his feet. They moved as one, he backstepping her towards the pine bed.

How long awaited last night had been, and how satisfying this morning is, she thought, still smiling. She sat up again, this time to observe the loft in all its pale sunlit luster. She rubbed her eyes delicately with her knuckles, and focussed on the easel before her. The cotton sheet cast over it had not been there the night before, the empty canvas in the moonlight making a memorable impression upon her. She wrapped a satin sheet around her nakedness and stepped intrepidly to the easel. Shoulders squared with the frame, she slipped the sheet off of the guard holding the cover away from the surface and over the corners of the canvas. Before her was an image of a sleeping woman in nude, an angelic look of contentment on her face. The face was her own. She drew back in flattered pleasure. She wanted to reach out and touch the face but she saw the paint was still wet; the palette still rested with fresh paint on the floor.

She examined the line and form of the nude further. She traced the silhouette of the body with her eye: the breasts were more voluptuous, the hips more narrow, the thighs more trim. It was a stranger's body.

She unclasped the satin sheet, looked down at her small breasts, her wide hips, her thick thighs. She ran her fingers over her face. She stooped to pluck up a paintbrush from the palette. She dabbed it heavily into the thick black oil. She widened the hips, heavied the thighs, reduced the breasts. She left the face untouched.

Was the canvas more beautiful empty than now, was fantasy more desirable than reality, the concealed canvas and concealed body more romantic than the revealed? Unresolved, she walked across the floor to her clothes, her ears filling with the sweeter music of the slaps her bare feet made upon the granite. Dressed, yet undressed, she threw the satin sheet over her painting and walked barefoot through the door, leaving paint-footprints behind her.

XVIII.

In Conclusion . . .

There really are no solutions to offer. There's no right or wrong answers, only that this is what women do, how we live and manage, the motifs of every relationship, with exceptions of course. I'm sure many men experience the same. I can only offer the creeds I live by, some Biblical, some contemporary, some timeless.

Remember:

"God never closes a door without
opening another,"

"They that sow in tears shall reap
in joy,"

"'Tis always darkest before the dawn,"

"If you love something, set it free.
If it comes back to you, it's yours
forever; if it doesn't, it was never
yours to begin with,"

"Honesty is the best policy,"

"What comes around goes around,"

"Follow your heart,"

And as Oscar Wilde so brilliantly put it:

"The only way to get rid of a temptation
is to yield to it."

Amen.